

ZYGOTE

Zygote is all at sea this month as he contemplates the fate of the web and the price of a catchy domain name. But first: an appeal from a rock star who is not so much surfing as sinking

ROGER AND OUT

The Environmental Alliance of New Mexico wants to put a one per cent sales tax on video games, computers and televisions. This is to fund a health campaign to help drag American children away from their screens and get them back outdoors. Zygote wonders if they have been inspired by the ever-youthful Roger Daltrey, who as lead singer with The Who will always be associated with the line "I hope I die before I get old".

Having failed to die before he got old, the ancient charmer has chosen to greet visitors to the band's brand new website with these words: "Welcome to The Who's first online home. I feel about as useful as a pork chop in a synagogue with all this Internet bollocks. It keeps millions of people in virtual conversation, which saves them getting burned by reality. I'm not a big fan of it. I hope you enjoy it. But do me a favour; leave the screen turned off sometimes. Go out. Get a life. Be lucky. Roger."

The kids of New Mexico should be so lucky.

FLIGHT OF THE PENGUIN

Finally, we have proof: the penguin is mightier than the sword. The French police recently announced that they are ditching Microsoft in favour of Linux, and Zygote agrees that bricking up all the Windows in French jails will be an enormous security improvement. The US

Army has also declared that it is to migrate from a Windows-based infrastructure to Linux, whose symbol is the cartoon penguin. The free Linux operating system will be responsible for a huge \$200 billion weapons program, because the US military does not want to risk Microsoft's endearing habit of built-in insecurity, which is a dangerous thing when you are dealing with all those weapons.

However, the most intriguing evidence of The Rise Of The Penguin comes from the last remnant of the Cold War, which is the border that divides Korea. The former warring states of North Korea and South Korea have agreed to develop joint systems that are based on – yes – Linux.

Zygote wonders if the officer ranks of the French Gendarmes, American Grunts and Korean Poodle-Stewers will be renamed in accordance with this globalised penguin hierarchy, from King Penguins and Emperor Penguins to the massed ranks of the Eggs.

WOULD YOU CREDIT IT?

Equifax is in the business of selling services to combat identity fraud. The services include credit checks that cost £14.95 for an online report using myequifax.co.uk, so customers can enjoy "the credit you deserve". Applicants are asked to supply copies of a great many documents for security purposes. These documents contain full

personal details, bank statements, credit card records, copies of utility bills and "a photocopy of the front and back of the card you wish to use to buy your product." Customers can either send all this information via the post or email electronic copies of everything along with the relevant images.

This seems barking mad to Zygote, who would not trust a single item of personal information to the non-secure electronic sewer in which today's emails float. The fact that it is Equifax encouraging such idiocy beggars belief.

SEA SICK

In February, a ship's anchor dragged across two cables off the coast of Egypt, slashing internet traffic in an intercontinental swathe running from Dubai to India. This minor shipping incident damaged trade and communications across the globe for over a week, but the implications are far more serious. No matter how sophisticated the web's infrastructure becomes, and no matter how secure it is kept, it all boils down to a few cables lying on the seabed.

The damaged cables in question are fibre-optic jobbies and they stretch all the way from Western Europe to Singapore, carrying 75 per cent of the connectivity in the Middle East and South Asia. There is no alternative. National political wrangles and prohibitive costs prevent the laying of thousands

of miles of continuous cable across land.

It seems inevitable that undersea cables will become a tempting target for terrorist attacks in the future. We have grown so used to the threat from the skies in recent times that we have forgotten to watch the seas, where the threat has lurked since the Viking invasion.

CRUISE CONTROL

Website domain names can be bought for less than three quid, so it seems rash to fork out £560,000 for one. Yet that's what cruise.co.uk has done. The company has stumped up the record price of over half a million to add an 's' to its domain, by buying cruises.co.uk. The site doesn't even sell services linked to short Scientologist actors or gay sex. It's all about the other sort of cruising – the sort that involves ships.

The cost of the domain name makes last year's purchase of mobile.co.uk seem like a positive bargain at £120,000, and it's a pound to a penny the buyers are not selling those dangly things for hypnotising babies. Zygote does not believe generic domain names are worth anything like this sort of money, as proved by companies that have done brilliantly by exploiting nonsense words, such as Yahoo!, Flickr, Google, Badoo, Bebo and eBay. Search engines are so smart these days that the actual name of a website is not what trawls in the punters. Instead it is smart algorithms linked to body text and key search phrases.

Zygote admits there is one magnificent exception to this rule, and there can be no industry analyst who would disagree. This is the domain name that changed hands for \$7 million, which is about £3,584,581.69p and worth every penny. We are talking, of course, about beer.com. **CS**

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244: IDENTITY THEFT



The first large-scale identity theft happened in 70BC near the Appian Way, close to Ancient Rome.



In the age of science, personal details became vulnerable to abuse by more complex methods.



Identity theft now threatens all of us, thanks to computerisation and criminal organisations.